DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 257 293 EC 172 721

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TITLE A Parent, School, Community Partnership in Career Education for the Mentally Retarded.
PUB DATE Apr 85
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children (63rd, Anaheim, CA, April 15-19, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adaptive Behavior (of Disabled); *Career Education; *Employer Attitudes; *Moderate Mental Retardation; *Parent Attitudes; Parent Teacher Cooperation; Secondary Education; *Teacher Attitudes; Vocational Interests

ABSTRACT

The presentation focused on findings of three studies, and implications for parent-teacher-employer involvement in development and implementation of career education programs for TMR (trainable mentally retarded) adolescents. Study I examined parent and teacher ratings of adaptive behavior and vocational interests. Study II investigated parent, teacher, and employer perceptions of the general goals, objectives, and content of a career education program for this population. Study III involved in-depth interviews with 10 parents from the parent sample of study I: the interviews investigated concerns, hopes and fears for their children, particularly related to life skills development. Across the studies, perceptions of parents, teachers and employers regarding the goals, objectives, and content of a career education program were generally consistent. Parents more strongly supported the teaching of academic skills than did teachers or employers. Predominant concerns of parents included the relatively little feedback from psychologists and teachers on assessment and educational progress. The consistency among perceptions of the groups was felt to hold promise for partnership in TMR career education. (CL)

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A Parent, School, Community Partnership in Career Education for the Mentally Retarded*

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*Paper presented at The Council for Exceptional Children Annual Convention, Anaheim, California, April, 1985.

EC 177721

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Abstract

The presentation focussed on findings of three studies, and implications for parent-teacher-employer involvement in development and implementation of career education programs for TMR adolescents. Study I examined parent and teacher ratings of adaptive behavior and vocational interests; study II, parent, teacher and employer concerns; and study III, parent concerns in depth.

A Parent, School, Community Partnership in Career Education for the Mentally Retarded

The presentation will report the findings of three related studies.

Study I:

Only fairly recently has the need for continuation of Special Education services to secondary level and development of career education programs for handicapped individuals been fully recognized (Brolin & D'Alonzo, Exceptional Children, 1979). These authors identified several critical issues in handicapped career education including: the need to reach consensus on a definition, as life-centered rather than job-centered; debate as to whether career education can be a separate program or can permeate the whole educational program; identification of primary responsibility for programs and identification of goals and approaches to goal attainment.

In this context, Study I surveyed parents and teachers in a large urban center, to investigate the following questions: (1) Are parent evaluations of trainable mentally handicapped (TMH) secondary students' developmental level and skills comparable to ratings by their teachers, and are ratings different for boys and girls, and for work-experience and non-work-experience students? (2) To what degree are parents of TMH students

involved in the school program, what is their desired role, what future expectations do they have for their children, and what concerns do they have regarding the educational program?

The first question was investigated by having parents (n=29) and teachers (n=6) complete Part I of the Adaptive Behavior Scale for each child. Parental involvement, expectations and concerns were assessed by an open-ended questionnaire. (See Tables I to IV.)[1]

No significant differences were found in teacher and parent ratings of the students' developmental level and skills. These findings suggest that parents' perceptions of their children's level of functioning are consistent with teachers' ratings of school functioning, and provide encouraging implications for programming. If parents and teachers are in agreement as to a child's level of functioning, the next step should be collaboration in identifying skills which need development. Only language developmental ratings were significantly different for boys and girls, and no significant differences were observed between work-experience and non-work-experience students. The surveyed parents and teachers agreed on many of the major points regarding what modifications could be made to the present program;

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Table I

Statistical Comparison of Parent and Teacher

Ratings of Students' Skills on the Adaptive Behavior Scale

DOMAIN	PARENT MEAN RATING	TEACHER MEAN RATING	t-RATIO	LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE
Independent Functioning	63.45	64.36	.519	.6090
Physical Development	21.77	21.86	.119	.9061
Economic Activity	6.27	6.45	.251	.8046
Language Development	28.95	27.63	.873	.3924
Numbers and Time	9.14	8.45	1.050	.3056
Vocational Activity	8.36	8.95	1.215	.2379
Self Direction	13.17	14.63	1.449	.1621
Responsibility	4.09	4.18	.418	.6800
Socialization	19.77	19.22	.638	.5302

Note: df = 21 for all comparisons
N = 22

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Table II

Statistical Comparison of Parent Ratings and
Teacher Ratings of Work-Experience and Non-Work-Experience Students

Domain	W-Exp Mean Rating	t-ratio	N-W-Exp. Mean Rating	df	Level of sig.
Parent Ratings	N=7		N=15		
Independent Functioning	61.28	.8004	64.47	17.50	.434
Physical Development	21.43	.3427	21.93	14.36	.737
Economic Activity	6.00	.2983	6.40	15.01	.770
Language Development	29.14	.1076	28.87	14.66	.916
Numbers and Time	9.86	.9834	8.80	13.67	.343
Vocational Activity	8.29	.1684	8.40	19.69	.868
Self Direction	12.14	1.1069	13.80	16.05	.285
Responsibility	4.29	.6455	4.00	14.22	.529
Socialization	19.71	.0591	19.80	17.43	.954
Teacher Ratings	N=10	N=19			
Independent Functioning	65.20	.0174	65.16	20.94	.987
Physical Development	22.50	.3926	22.10	24.38	.698
Economic Activity	5.67	1.0473	7.05	14.44	.312
Language Development	30.20	1.1010	27.32	18.70	.285
Numbers and Time	7.70	.71761	8.58	14.09	.485
Vocational Activity	8.80	1.0698	9.47	15.56	.301
Self Direction	15.30	.1362	15.47	17.38	.893
Responsibility	4.70	.9792	4.26	24.03	.337
Socialization	21.50	1.2485	19.63	18.11	.228

*Statistically significant $< .05$ level

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Table III

Statistical Comparison of Parent Ratings and Teacher Ratings of Student Skills Between Sexes

Domain	Mean Rating (Boys)	t-ratio	Mean Rating (Girls)	df	Level of sig.
Parent Ratings	N=12		N=10		
Independent Functioning	63.50	.0257	63.40	16.76	.980
Physical Development	21.25	.8923	22.40	14.52	.387
Economic Activity	6.08	.3290	6.50	21.57	.745
Language Development	27.83	1.0542	30.30	21.39	.304
Numbers and Time	9.00	.3043	9.30	19.76	.764
Vocational Activity	8.25	.3449	8.50	21.70	.730
Self Direction	13.17	.1491	13.40	18.77	.883
Responsibility	4.0	.5094	4.20	14.28	.618
Socialization	19.33	.6792	20.30	18.19	.506
Teacher Ratings	N=15		N=14		
Independent Functioning	63.13	1.9887	67.37	19.24	.061
Physical Development	21.73	1.0418	22.78	27.56	.307
Economic Activity	6.27	.6389	7.00	27.72	.528
Language Development	26.00	2.1032	30.79	26.56	*.045
Numbers and Time	8.20	.1510	8.36	27.79	.881
Vocational Activity	9.07	.6589	9.43	27.03	.516
Self Direction	14.80	1.1364	16.07	28.79	.265
Responsibility	4.27	.6805	4.57	25.76	.502
Socialization	19.87	.6127	20.71	26.12	.545

*Statistically significant < 05 level

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Table IV

Desired Role of Parents in the School Program:
Responses by Parents and Teachers

	No. of Parents	No. of Teachers
Reinforcement of school program	10	2
Parent input (advisory)	5	1
Consultation in placement and programs	5	4
Assist in programs (aides)	1	1
Closer communication with the school	6	3
Encourage and train independence	0	4
Express goals for their child	0	4
No response	6	0

Note: Columns total more than total number of respondents because respondents could give multiple responses

However, both groups appeared to be unaware that they share mutual concerns. With improved communication, the home and school could work together toward common goals, which would improve their children's educational programs.

Parent and teacher expectations for the children's future employability generally agreed; however, in many cases, both were undecided as to the type of job most suitable to the student, pointing to a need to investigate a variety of jobs that may be made available to the students, to discover what skills employers expect of the students for employability, and how the school can increase future employability.

Study II:

Given the need to develop a comprehensive career education curriculum for TMH individuals, Study II investigated parent, teacher, and employer perceptions of the general goals, objectives and content of a career education program for this population. On a questionnaire, developed for the study, ratings from parents and teachers of elementary and secondary level TMH pupils, from employers involved in work experience programs and employers not so involved, were compared.

The two-part questionnaire was completed by 106

(42%) of the parents surveyed. 31 (81.6%) of the teachers employed with two large urban school systems, teaching TMH pupils, replied. 22 individuals, 55%, from the employer sample responded, (14 from work experience programs). (See Tables V and VI.)

Parents', teachers', and employers' perceptions of the goals, objectives and content of a career education program were generally consistent. Parents, however, more strongly supported the teaching of academic skills than did teachers or employers. Also, a high degree of consistency was found between teacher and employer subgroups. More parents of elementary TMH children than those of secondary TMH children considered their children potentially capable of living in an independent setting and obtaining competitive employment.

The high level of consistency in these findings between parents, teachers and employers supports the involvement of all three groups in the planning and development of appropriate career education programs for TMH students.

Study III:

The final study involved in-depth interviews with 10 available parents, from the parent sample of Study I. The purpose was to investigate concerns, hopes and fears

TABLE V
PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS, TEACHERS AND EMPLOYERS AGREEING ON THE GENERAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF CAREER EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR THE TMH

ITEM	PARENTS (108)*	TEACHERS (31)*	EMPLOYERS (22)*
1. Pupil centered	98.1	100	95.5
2. Parent's consent for placement	97.2	100	90.9
3. Encourage parent involvement	90.5	90.3	95.5
4. Pupil participation	90.6	83.9	86.4
5. Placement procedure	95.3	93.6	100
6. Regular assessment	92.5	96.8	86.3
7. Up-to-date student records	96.3	100	100
8. Use task analysis	91.6	100	81.8
9. Sequence skills	98.1	100	95.5
10. Initiate pre-school programs	86.7	96.8	81.9
11. Begin career education early in student's career	79.3	77.5	81.9
12. Consider geographic location	77.3	80.6	68.2
13. Use community resources	92.4	100	81.9
14. (a) Teach specific job skills	67	64.5	59.1
(b) Teach general job skills	76.4	80.7	81.8
(c) Teach academic skills	82.1	64.5	54.6
(d) Teach independent living skills	86.8	90.3	81.8
15. consider regular class placements	83.9	80.7	72.7
16. Ensure students have a marketable skill	88.7	71	72.7
17. (a) Teacher provide career guidance	40.6	67.8	50
(b) Guidance counsellor provide career guidance	36.8	38.7	50
(c) Both provide career guidance	84.9	67.7	81.8
18. Provide personnel inservice training	95.3	100	100
19. Logical curriculum format	92.5	100	77.3
20. Mandated curriculum	45.3	54.9	22.7
21. Set age limits to begin and terminate students from programs	60.3	61.3	27.2
22. (a) Prepare student in elementary years	63.2	61.3	82.8
(b) Prepare student in post-secondary years	36.8	32.3	18.1
(c) Prepare student in high school years	30.2	38.7	22.7
23. (a) Limits class size to 4-6	43.4	58.1	63.7
(b) Limits class size to 6-8	54.7	61.3	45.3
(c) Limits class size to 8-10	10.3	19.4	13.6

* Number of respondents

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TABLE VI
PERCENTAGE OF AGREEMENT BY PARENTS, TEACHERS AND EMPLOYERS
ON THE SPECIFIC SKILLS THAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SCHOOL

ITEM	PARENTS (106)*	TEACHERS (3*)*	EMPLOYERS (22)*
1. Filling out application forms	83.1	90.4	77.3
2. Write a letter	80.2	70 9	63.7
3. Structured reading	91.5	74.2	54.6
4. Tell time	96.2	96.8	86.4
5. Handle money	94.3	96.8	95.5
6. Computational skills	87.8	80.7	68.2
7. (a) Communicate - at home	71.7	83.9	63.6
(b) Communicate - on the job	97.2	100	86.4
(c) Communicate - on the telephone	87.8	93.6	90.9
(d) Communicate - in groups	90.6	96.8	90.9
(e) Communicate - in school	95.3	100	90.9
(f) Communicate - in public	88.7	93.5	81.8
8. Leisure time activities	76.4	83.9	63.6
9. Physical education	84	87.1	77.3
10. (a) Indoor safety	78.3	93 6	68.2
(b) Outdoor safety	84.9	96.8	90.9
(c) On the job safety	89.6	100	95.5
11. Use of transportation system	84.9	90 3	86.3
12. Use of community resources	85.8	90.3	95.5
13. Sex education	72.5	64.5	77.3
14. Moral beliefs	66	58.4	59.1
15. Hygiene	80.1	87.1	96.5
16. Independent living skills	84	93 6	86.3
17. Good nutrition	88.8	96.8	95.4
18. Food preparation	87.8	96 8	86.4

CONTINUED...

* Number of respondents

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TABLE VI (Continued)
PERCENTAGE OF AGREEMENT BY PARENTS, TEACHERS AND EMPLOYERS
ON THE SPECIFIC SKILLS THAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SCHOOL

ITEM	PARENTS (108)*	TEACHERS (31)*	EMPLOYERS (22)*
19. Citizenship responsibilites	88.7	96.8	95.4
20. (a) Interaction skills with family	74.5	83.9	54.5
(b) Interaction skills with supervisors	82.1	100	86.3
(c) Interaction skills with co-workers	88.6	100	95.5
(d) Interaction skills with friends	83.9	90.3	77.3
21. (a) Work with supervision	88.7	96.8	77.3
(b) Work without supervision	67.9	96.7	86.4
22. Work ethic	93.4	100	95.5
23. Follow directions	96.2	96.8	100
24. (a) Appropriate behavior - at home	75.4	74.2	59.1
(b) Appropriate behavior - on the job	92.5	96.8	95.5
(c) Appropriate behavior - social situations	84.9	93.6	94.4
(d) Appropriate behavior - at school	96.2	96.8	90
25. Work at consistent pace	86.8	100	90.9
26. Obey and respect authority	92.4	100	100
27. Accept criticism	86.8	96.8	85.3
28. Work on a team	95.3	96.8	90.9
29. Attend work daily	93.3	100	100
30. Perform tasks accurately	93.3	100	95.4
31. Be aware of time schedule	92.4	100	95.5
32. Fine motor skills	84.9	93.6	68.1
33. Job decisions	83.9	93.5	68.2
34. Tolerance	82.1	96.8	81.8
35. Physical stamina	80.2	93.6	86.3
36. Basic job requirements	94.4	100	100
37. Consistent on-task performance	93.4	96.8	95.5

* Number of respondents

for their children, particularly related to life skills development. Among the predominant themes were concerns that, while their children have shown significant improvement during their years of education, parents have received relatively little feedback from psychologists and teachers on assessment and educational progress, the children have not been educated to their fullest potential, and adult adjustment is, indeed, uncertain for the TMH individual. (See Table VII.)

For the three studies, because of small sample size and the limited number of programs available for survey, generalizations and conclusions based on the data must be viewed with caution. However, the strong degree of consistency among the perceptions of the groups involved holds promise for a parent, school, community partnership in TMH career education.

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[1]A brief report of this study was published in the International Journal of Rehabilitation Research, 1984, 7.

Table VII

Predominant Parent-Interview Content Themes

Preschool:

1. Recognition that "something was wrong", and confusion as to cause, with a need to explain "why".
2. Uncertainty about the nature of the child's difficulties, with lack of knowledge of, or understanding of any assessments. *
3. Problems in seeking and finding appropriate placements and resources. *
4. Parent determination, initiative, and involvement in the child's education. *

School Years:

5. Over the school years, there has been progress, but not enough progress.
6. Life skills and career education skills have been inadequately developed.
7. Language skills have been inadequately developed.
8. Academic skills have been inadequately developed.
9. Family and neighborhood relationships are basically good, and the TMH child is likeable and well liked; however, friendships are few.
10. Hobbies and recreational interests are few.

Table VII (Continued)

11. Interest in the opposite sex is limited.
Future:
12. Parent fears and concerns for the future of their TMH adolescent are many.

* Also relevant to school years.